DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 367 047 EA 025 603

AUTHOR Tomlin, Michael E.
TITLE Redefining the Public Education Industry.
PUB DATE 94
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Industrial Structure; Organizational Change; *Organizational Development; *Organizational Theories; Productivity; *Public Education

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that public education, as a contemporary industry, is more like business than any other organization. The traditional view of education defines the student as customer, the teacher as worker, teaching and learning as the products, and school boards as overly influential. An alternative paradigm is presented that defines school board members as the elected representatives of the customers of education--local business and parent groups. The product is preparedness, which has been paid for in advance by the customers. Students, in this paradigm, are not the customers, but the workforce of the American public schools. The customers are those who receive the end product of education's services; i.e., parents, higher education, business, government, and society. Teachers are not the labor force, but managers of the workers and the work. It is argued that these new definitions will allow the industry of schooling to move forward as never before. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

EA

ED 367 047

REDEFINING THE PUBLIC EDUCATION INDUSTRY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

by

Michael E. Tomlin

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
M.E. Tomlin
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Introduction

The 1990s will almost certainly prove to be the decade of restructured, reengineered, and reformed school "debate". Whether or not it will become the decade of school change is still to be determined. It has been interesting to note with the tremendous number of articles, books, speeches, and audio and video tapes on school change that few if any address redefining the education industry in terms of its customers, workers, management, product, and ownership. Although many articles and ideas have been offered on how to treat the workers, or how to treat the customers, these have been based upon traditional theories that are no longer valid. This article attempts to put a contemporary "spin" on the traditional, thus clarifying much confusion of contemporary school change attempts.

Redefining Education

Education's Customers

When teachers are asked, usually at conferences, workshops, inservice programs, or in graduate classes

EA025603

who their customer is they invariably reply "the students." This traditional thought, that students are the customers of education is the first and foremost mistake that hinders true educational reform. It is true of course that the students are the ones who show up daily at the schools and directly receive the services of schooling. Just as if they had gone to the movie theater on Friday evening, and had paid their way with their parent's money they seem to be the obvious customer. They are the one's who receive the service.

However, at the theater, and other establishments in town customers have certain rights. They have the right to leave at any time they desire. They have the right to take advantage of as little or as much of the offered services as they desire. They have the right to demand their money be returned if the product or service does not meet their standards. Public school students have no such rights, not real, not assumed, not even imagined. Most states have enacted compulsory attendance laws that remove many "customer rights" from the children. In fact my research can find few cases of a seventh grader strolling out of class and into the office stating "my teacher stinks, I want my money back." And, I have found fewer cases still when the money was actually returned.

In the "real" world where there are customers they are always right, they do not have to attend services they have paid for, they can choose their doctors, agents, lawyers, and accountants, they are coveted and in fact recruited. The conclusion here is obvious - **the student is not the customer** of public education.

Who then is education's customer? The answer is simply those who receive the end product of education's services. When a graduating student leaves high school where does he or she go? The answer to this question defines education's customers. Quite simply the young adult goes to the workforce of business and industry; or goes into further schooling at a college, university, or other institution; or he or she goes into the military or other government service. They join the ranks of American taxpayers, and become members of adult society, two other customers of education. And they leave the home of their parents, who also have been indirect customers. These are the customers of public schooling: parents, higher education, business, government, and society.

Obviously many of these customer groups are interrelated in that one could be a simultaneous member of several, but these are the destinations of the product of schooling, and the ones who have paid the

actual cost of the student's education. They are also the ones who will, in addition to the student, benefit or suffer by the level of quality that comes their way from the public schools.

Education's Product

The product of American public schooling is a somewhat simpler debate. It is not of course "the child" as is often stated. The product is what the receiving customer gets, and hopefully desires. After all the customer has paid for it in advance. So the product of schooling is **preparedness**. This is what each customer desires that the high school graduate bring to their situation. Higher education institutions want their freshman to bring a level of academic **preparedness** that will allow them to be successful with college level curricula without costly remediation. The business community desires its new workers to come with a level of **preparedness** that will allow it to train the workers in its business, again, without the need for costly remediation of subjects presumably already learned. Society desires an adult that is **prepared** to become an informed voter and active, productive citizen. One who will responsibly work, and pay taxes, and obey the democratic laws of

the land, and contribute to the neighborhood, community, state, and nation.

It is these levels of **preparedness** that educations' customers pay for and constitutes their desires in an educational product.

Education's Workforce

Those of us who have been involved in the evaluation of teachers have a saying that we like to use in "feedback conferences" regarding the involvement and activity of students in lessons. That statement is that "whoever is doing the work is doing the learning." We use this phrase to emphasize the importance of students being the workers, and not just the teacher. And this is how it should be.

While the teachers certainly work hard in the classroom they are not the workforce of education, nor is the work there for them to do. The purpose of the classroom and the work is to improve the students' preparedness (product), and it is to be done by the students. They, **the students, are the workforce of the American public schools**. From ages six to sixteen (in most states) the nation's youth are basically, and for good reason, required to attend work camp (school) for nine months out of the year. During this time they

work on a product (preparedness) that a future customer of the schools is paying for in advance and will ultimately want. The students are managed and supervised by teachers working to insure a quality product is fashioned by educations' frontline workers.

Opponents of this concept of the student as the worker often ask about student pay. The answer is simple - the students are paid, and this pay is held for them in escrow until they leave the state mandated youth work system at age 16, 17, or eighteen. Their pay is based upon individual merit and over the years the students develop an academic portfolio attesting to the skill with which they have invested their time and energies at work. Upon graduation they receive a certificate of net worth as attested to by a diploma and transcript of grades. This certificate, depending on its net worth is accepted, and may be cashed for entry into higher education, the workforce, or the government or other military service. Those students who have better managed their portfolio throughout the years have a higher net worth upon graduation than those who invested the minimum, and may receive scholarships, or other monetary benefits for their efforts.

Education's Management

The management of public schooling is comprised of the team of degreed professionals who are in supervisory positions. This team is usually made up of a superintendent of schools, assorted assistant superintendents, central office coordinators and directors, principals and assistant principals, and teachers. The inclusion of teachers as part of the school management team, although touched on in site-based structures still remains a departure from traditional thought. Traditional and obsolete thought that has teachers as the workforce of the education industry.

In most schools the students as the line workers are organized into work teams of 20 to 30 each. These teams are supervised by a representative of the school's management group, a teacher. The teacher, as do most executives plans and organizes the work of the students, supervises that work, teaches the workforce how to do work they cannot do, and makes judgments about the quality of each worker's effort and product (level of preparedness). Based upon the judgments of the manager teacher the students are awarded grades for their productivity, and their portfolio is established.

Over ten years ago researcher David Berliner defined the "Executive Functions" of teaching, but his point never was incorporated into school reform. But today, while the school district itself is managed by central office executives, the all important front line management leading to efficiency, effectiveness, quality, productivity, and ultimately to customer satisfaction is performed by classroom executives, the teachers; and of course their team leader the principal teacher.

As in any industry education must insure that it is not over staffed with administrators. Since teachers are now part of this group other levels of educational service workers must be developed to deliver front line instructional services, workers such as para-teachers, and teaching aides.

Education's Board of Directors

As with most public companies the education industry has a structure of board control over its independent corporations, or in education's case, its school districts. In business, members are on the boards of corporations due to their, major stock holdings and interest in the company. They choose the chief executive officer of the company, and approve

major product lines, advertising campaigns, new directions, the abandonment of declining products, and make other major decisions.

While school boards have taken a lot of heat in recent years regarding their so-called micro-management of schools, and the often reported "attacks" by the religious right trying to break the stronghold of the liberal left, in comparison they seldom exert much more influence than members of a corporate board. And, that is a role that they should play, as they gain their seats on the boards due not to stock holdings, but rather to very similar community interest holdings. In other words, board members are elected to represent specific philosophical viewpoints and direct the future of the school district through policy development in a manner consistent with those philosophies.

Just as voting members of many boards carry the proxy of great numbers of members or stock holders, school board members often represent other community groups. This is not a conflict of interest, but rather the purpose of local control, and of the process - to bring the representative democratic system to schooling.

Summary

Traditional thought often holds public schooling to be quite different from other business related industries, when in effect as a contemporary industry education is more like business than any other organization. Traditional thought has also throttled many efforts at school reform due to its outdated and incorrect definitions of the education industry. Definitions that held the child to be the customer, the teacher to be the worker, teaching and learning to be the product, and boards to be overly influential.

A modern "spin" on the whole industry of education allows for purposefully accurate definitions of schooling and its workforce. Definitions that will change the rules of school reform. For as Albert Einstein is reported to have said "if our theories are wrong our solutions will make matters worse." One of the reasons many school reform efforts have failed is due to the incorrect theory of the structure of the industry that the failed solutions have been based upon.

With these new definitions reform can begin anew, and begin with workable solutions based upon accurate theory. The accurate theory that schooling is a major business in every community. The accurate theory that

the members of the school board are the elected representatives of the customers of education, namely, local business, and parent groups. The accurate theory that the product of education is preparedness, and it has been paid for in advance by the customers. The accurate theory that students are not the customers but rather the workers of the school, and the teachers are not the labor force, but rather the managers of the workers and the work.

With these new definitions the industry of schooling can move forward as never before. Move forward with a purpose and direction, and without apology, for finally it will have defined itself in the community, and in the natural order of all other organizations.